



Focus: Duty to Educate

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School Leaders Create Culture of Equity and Success

by Nilka Avilés, Ed.D.

Transforming schools requires looking at the context of the system and its policies. But how do we accelerate schools' transformation?

IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework presents a model for assessing school conditions and outcomes, identifying leverage points informing action. The framework poses five key questions: (1) What do we need? (2) How do we make change happen? (3) Which fundamentals must be secured? (4) Where do we focus systems change? and (5) What outcomes will result? (Robledo Montecel, 2010).

Considering this theory of change, which is grounded in research and practice, the U.S. Department of Education funded IDRA's School Turnaround and Reenergizing for Success (STAARS) Leaders project. Designed to enhance student academic success in the San Antonio Independent School District, the project is empowering school leaders to build a culture dedicated to equity and excellence for all students. The project activities incorporate three knowledge sets: (1) Neil Farber's psychology of success principles, (2) social justice leadership qualities, and (3) equity-based principles of education.

This article highlights the culture of equity and success created by two school leaders. The stories show their patterns of thinking, feeling, acting and speaking that are causing success in their campuses (Chicago Low-Performing Turnaround Model, 2013).

Smith Elementary School principal, Ms. Vanessa Fox-Norton, focuses on maintaining a climate and culture of collaboration. She takes action when problems arise and creates an environment where stakeholders have a part in bringing about innovative solutions.



Ms. Fox-Norton builds capacity through a layered-approach to professional development that includes book studies, setting goals to specific data, and accountability for all grade levels beyond what is tested. In a style she calls, “circling the wagons,” she brings teachers together to understand processes and structures of classroom leadership. They use Tier I instruction, which is an evidence-based curriculum aligned with the standards, assessments, core instruction and support interventions.

To sustain quality teaching, Ms. Fox-Norton relies on formative and summative assessments. She values the support of Mr. Doug Littlefield from the district's office of academics; Ms. Veronica Alaniz, her school implementation specialist; and the Office of School Improvement led by Mr. Mark Cantu. Ms. Fox-Norton takes advantage of support systems to ensure students and teachers are successful.

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“The United States is still uniquely committed to one education system that prepares us all for living in a great democracy. We must preserve this commitment.”

— Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

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She acknowledges the importance of partnerships, specifically IDRA's student-centered professional development. This support has concentrated on inferencing and reasoning, numeracy and writing, and coaching and mentoring services. The University of Virginia and the Education Service Center for Region 20 also provide training support.

At her school, the staff know the students by their names and values them and their parents. Ms. Fox-Norton added: "Start with the heart and build relationships with teachers, students and parents to have an impact in teaching and learning where everyone feels valued and works toward the achievement of our shared vision."

Dr. Julio García, principal at Highlands High School, uses collaborative planning to ensure the school's vision aligns with the campus goals. With an overall focus on Tier 1 instruction, staff outline problems of practice and identify steps for effective solutions. They ask: "What does it look like, and how do we know it is effective?" The campus instructional focus aligns content with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), language with the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and the social emotional with the PBIS (Positive Behaviors, Interventions and Supports) Champs. These are the Texas standards for academic learning, English language acquisition and the social-emotional needs of students.

Dr. García organizes staff to anticipate challenges and to address problems on hand. "Are we aligned with the *what* and the *how*?" He enables a relentless focus on learning results. He is persistent in monitoring teaching and planning. Teachers take "learning walks" to observe their peers and



provide feedback. He demonstrates to each team how professional learning communities impact productive outcomes in teaching and learning.

Dr. García is putting in place structures, systems and leaders that will be maintained even through the change of leadership. "We have formed a coalition by creating a snowball effect, where teachers are a part of the combined actions to increase rigor and relevance building their own capacity to achieve results."

These school leaders share the following common themes in their work.

- Demonstrate a high level of knowledge about issues and solutions regarding diverse learners.
- Build a high level of trust and collaboration.
- Use power to persuade and influence others to take informed actions.
- Be a catalyst that transforms a vision to reality.
- Be an advocate who is passionate in the pursuit of equity and excellence.
- Be innovative and take a stand for a purpose.

They are inspiring others, building leadership, and holding stakeholders to high expectations for all students to accomplish their school vision and goals. They have found joy and passion in doing so and are committed to keeping students in school, succeeding academically.

Resources

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Addressing “Ecological Shock” – Supporting Refugee Students in School

by Kristin Grayson, Ph.D., and Hannah Sung

Imagine you are a student sitting in a classroom. Even though you've been in the classroom many times before, everything still seems foreign to you. Everyone is speaking in a language you recognize but can't quite fully comprehend. Your classmates seem to be following rules only they seem to know.

The teacher has given the class a task to work on. It seems that everyone knows what to do except you. You want to ask for help but you don't know what questions to ask. The other students are already writing. You suddenly feel lost and alone.

This is the experience of many refugee children. Since 2005, three quarters of a million refugees have entered the United States. They make up an increasingly more diverse population in terms of their countries of origin and primary languages (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2016; Hooper, et al., 2016).

Refugees are a specific group of immigrants. According to the 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (United Nations, 1951), a *refugee* is someone who has a deep and well-founded fear of being persecuted on the basis of race, religion, national origin, or membership in a particular political or social group and is outside their country of origin. Because of this fear, they are unable or do not feel safe enough to return to that country.

Many refugee children and youth have experienced some kind(s) of trauma, including children born in the United States and those seeking refugee status. Trauma-related symptoms can be subtle or clearly apparent to others. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as an “emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea” (2008).

Refugee children and youth may have directly or indirectly experienced war- or conflict-related trauma. Such conflict destabilizes and disrupts an individual's existing supports and relationships, leading to what researchers call an “ecological shock” (Dryden-Peterson, et al., 2017). As a result, traumatic experiences may result in physical, social, emotional and mental loss that can lead to depression, anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Betancourt, et al., 2012; Hart, 2009).

The effects of trauma can be far-reaching and negatively affect refugee students' ability to function on a day-to-day basis. Recurring nightmares may interrupt sleep cycles and impair concentration throughout the day (Hart, 2009). Uncertainty about the future may contribute to high levels of anxiety that can inhibit thinking processes (Graham, et al., 2016).

Refugee children and youth may experience a second wave of shock when they are relocated. In refugee camps, they may be exposed to unsanitary and unsafe conditions with little access to medical or other forms of care (Bemak & Chung, 2017). In asylum countries, refugee children and youth may encounter racism and discrimination, adding to their existing trauma and stress (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Their perceived differentness can make them targets of bullying as well (Graham, et al., 2016; Hart, 2009). As a result, many refugee children and youth experience extreme loneliness and isolation.

Yet, it is problematic to see refugee students only as “traumatized” because it focuses on negative aspects of students' experiences rather than their strengths and assets (Taylor & Sidhu, 2011).

Legal Requirements and Equitable Opportunities

Schools can pro-actively create a welcoming and positive learning environment to help refugee students cope with trauma by building relationships and providing supports. All refugee students are entitled to an equitable education in

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Traumatic events can be an “ecological shock” that destabilizes and disrupts an individual's existing supports and relationships

IDRA EAC-South

For more information about the IDRA EAC-South or to request technical assistance, contact us at 210-444-1710 or eacsouth@idra.org.

Additional resources are available online at <http://www.idra.org/eac-south/>

funded by the U.S. Department of Education

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U.S. schools. The *Plyler vs. Doe* U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1982 ruled that school districts are required to provide all children, including undocumented students, free and equitable access to public schools.

Equitable access includes decreasing obstacles in paperwork requirements and processes for admission as well as providing support for learning English (see article on Page 5). Schools cannot require student or parent social security numbers. Schools also may find alternatives to other traditionally required paperwork, like birth certificates and school transcripts. Schools can employ liaisons and language interpreters to help navigate regulations and paperwork.

Special funding to support refugee students and their educational needs falls under various federal programs, such as Title I and Title III. [For more information consult with your federal programs officer and see the U.S. Department of Education letter to the country’s Chief State School Officers (Duncan, 2015).]

Creating a Supportive Environment

Schools play a central role in helping refugee students find supports and build relationships (Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). Creating a supportive, welcoming environment involves – first and foremost – understanding the unique situations of refugee students. Their diverse experiences may require different types and/or levels of assistance (Rutter, 2006; Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). Importantly, recognizing the diversity of refugee students can help school staff, teachers and students be sensitive to cultural differences and avoid stereotypical characterizations (NCTSN, 2008).

In the classroom, teachers can demonstrate appreciation of refugee students as an asset to the school because of their array of experiences and languages. This creates a more inclusive cultural climate that builds supportive relationships and breaks down barriers.

A positive learning environment involves a commitment to equity. Targeted, equitable policies and procedures can help educators effectively respond to refugee students’ needs. School leaders can coordinate referral procedures and services (school counselors, school psychologists, mental health professionals) to provide a holistic approach to address the effects of trauma.

Schools can foster belonging by including refugee students as members of school and classroom communities rather than physically or socially isolating them (Taylor & Sidhu, 2011; NCTSN, 2008). Promoting caring, stable social rela-

Latest IDRA Parent Involvement Tool Focuses on Keeping Public Money in Public Schools

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

Last year, three grandmothers whose children graduated from public high schools and whose grandchildren are now in public schools spoke at the Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Parent Institute. They discussed the importance of keeping public money in public schools. The session, led by Velma Ybarra, Diana Herrera and Jesusita Rios, was designed to inform parents about vouchers and similar schemes and to encourage advocacy for children in public schools. They gave an overview of how funding systems affect classrooms and how the state can identify necessary support mechanisms for neighborhood public schools. Given the urgency of this issue across the country, a session on equitable school funding will again be presented at this year’s parent institute.

In the *IDRA Newsletter*, we have been highlighting some of the sessions from last year’s event and have developed tools for school

districts to strengthen family engagement. The materials in the third toolkit include examples from the lower Rio Grande Valley, video discussion, stories of successes by Education CAFE groups and the steps to form a similar local organization.

The 20th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Parent Institute will be held on April 6, in San Antonio. It will be bilingual (English-Spanish), with some sessions live-streamed, and offer an array of concurrent presentations of interest to families, with many of the presentations led by parents. For information about the event, see <https://budurl.me/IDRApiii8w>.

**See the new training kit online at
<https://budurl.me/IDRAfamPKG3w>**



tionships is central to helping refugee students rebuild a support network.

The IDRA EAC-South equity assistance center supports districts across an 11-state region of the southeastern United States to put systems into place and prepare teachers to welcome all students, including refugee students, into their classrooms. Please see our website at <http://www.idraeacsouth.org> for more information.

Resources

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Schools' Duty to Educate English Learner Immigrant and Migrant Students

by Kristin Grayson, Ph.D.

English learners in our schools are a vastly diverse group, from the languages they speak to the age they began learning English to how they entered the school system. By instilling policies and practices that value their language, multiculturalism, and families and that provide them the tools necessary to succeed, we can help prepare these students for flourish in the global economy.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, most English learners were born in this country and are U.S. citizens, comprising 85 percent of English learners in elementary schools and 62 percent at the secondary level (Sanchez, 2017). This article focuses on the other portion of English learners who are recent immigrant, migrant and refugee students, who may require more intensive, comprehensive services.

The federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) defines *immigrant students* as those who were born outside the United States and have not been enrolled in U.S. schools for more than three school years. ESEA's Title III section outlines specific funding for assisting immigrant students.

Migrant students are those who, because of their parents' jobs, such as in agriculture and/or fishing, move from place to place frequently. Schools must provide assistance in the continuity in their education and specific record-keeping. Funding for schools to support migrant students is provided through Migrant Education Program under Title I: Part C of ESEA.

The U.S. Department of Education's *Newcomer Toolkit* provides definitions for other categories of students who are born outside of the United States, including refugees, asylees and unaccompanied youth (NCELA, 2017). Regardless of these categories, it is the responsibility of U.S. schools to provide a free and equitable education to all children. (See IDRA's notice on Page 7.)

Not all, but many immigrant, migrant and refugee students are English learners. The U.S. Department of Education recently published a

new interactive resource showing numbers and percentages of English learners by state (2017). Data show that there are more than 400 different languages spoken at homes of English learners, Spanish being the most prevalent.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* stated that schools must provide English language support for students in order to give them an equitable access to education as is provided in the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Wright, 2010).

Schools may include a variety of program models, including newcomer, bilingual, dual language, and sheltered academic content instruction, to take into account the varying needs of English learners. With the great variation of need for different supports for learning English, programs for learning English need to be based on the three criteria named in the 1981 *Castañeda v. Pickard* court decision (Wright, 2010). The program should (1) be based on sound educational theory, (2) be appropriately implemented to have the intended results, and (3) be evaluated and adjusted in order to be effective so that students learn English and succeed academically.

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* creates a broader focus of accountability for the progress of English learners by requiring states and districts to include English learners in more specific ways to assure that their educational needs are noted and addressed (NASEM, 2017).

The National Academy Press of 2016 released a comprehensive literature review describing how to put policy into practice at the classroom level. The report outlines promising classroom practices to use to help English learners at different grade levels (Gandara, 2016).

Promising classroom practices for English learners at the pre-kindergarten level through fifth grade, as identified in the report include:

- using explicit instruction during literacy instruction;

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The Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* stated that schools must provide English language support for students in order to give them an equitable access to education as is provided in the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

- building academic language across the content areas;
- using visual and verbal cues to make content comprehensible;
- developing peer-assisted learning opportunities;
- drawing on students' home language, culture, and knowledge;
- being aware of challenges and obstacles to learning; and
- providing small group learning opportunities for extra support.

The development of a student's home language and engagement in literacy (reading and writing) remain critical at these early ages.

Recommended promising practices for middle school English learners (grades 6 to 8) are similar. These practices include:

- making grade level content accessible;
- supporting writing and comprehension in core content;
- building on students' home language, culture, and experiences; and
- using collaborative and peer-learning group activities.

During the middle school grades it is also important to keep in mind the influence of social and emotional impacts on learning. The classroom, school and curricular requirements must all be examined and designed to appropriately support and move English learners toward academic success (NASEM, 2017).

Practices for supporting high school English learners (grades 9-12) include:

- developing English in all core content classes;
- integrating oral and written skill development across content areas;
- structuring opportunities for writing;
- developing reading and writing through systematic text-based approaches;
- providing direct comprehension instruction;
- extending discussions about text and interpretations;
- fostering engagement in literacy;
- providing peer-assisted learning opportunities; and
- offering small group explicit instruction.

IDRA has rigorously and methodically studied exemplary programs and guidance for serving English learners in schools across the nation. A

number of tools are available, including the following.

Framework for Effective Instruction of Secondary English Language Learners – IDRA's research-based framework provides guidance for design, implementation and evaluation of an effective EL program.



Good Schools and Classrooms for Children Learning English – A Guide – a rubric for evaluating five dimensions that are necessary for success: school indicators, leadership, student outcomes, support, and programmatic and instructional practices.



Science Instructional Strategies for English Learners – A Guide for Elementary and Secondary Grades – a practical resource for teachers focusing on teaching learning premises (theoretical underpinnings for each strategy); research support; essential teacher competencies (pedagogical skills necessary for effective implementation of each strategy); steps for strategy implementation – along with a matrix of techniques for implementation.



Semillitas de Aprendizaje Teacher Guide (Manual de Maestro) – a guide with 10 units to support early childhood bilingual literacy development. Each unit has a set of classroom activities that include a morning song, storytelling, literacy connection with



STEM explorations, center activities, phonemic awareness, writing and alphabet knowledge, English transition, family connections and informal assessment. Also includes planning tools connected to knowledge, skill and concept objectives along with suggestions for using technology in early childhood.

In addition, the IDRA EAC-South is one of four federally-funded centers that provide technical assistance and training at the request of school districts and other responsible governmental agencies to build capacity of local educators to ensure a more equitable learning environment for all students. We have many years of experience helping districts and schools plan and implement language programs and is ready to help schools in the U.S. South.

Resources

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Immigrant Students' Rights to Attend Public Schools

As schools are registering students for the next school year, IDRA is releasing this new infographic as a reminder that public schools, by law, must serve all children.

Not only should undocumented students not be discouraged from attending, they are required to attend school under the state's compulsory education laws.

And parents should be assured that the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* restricts schools from sharing information with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE).

At IDRA, we are working to strengthen schools to work for all children, families and communities. Help us make this goal a reality for every child; we simply cannot afford the alternatives.

Denying children of undocumented workers access to an education is unconstitutional and against the law.

This infographic in full color and bilingual is available on IDRA's website along with many other resources for schools and advocates. We encourage you to share them across your networks.

<https://budurl.me/2-IDRAimmiged>

Other Tools...
eBook in English and Spanish

One-page bilingual flier to copy and share

Welcoming Immigrant Students in School

Immigrant students are guaranteed access to free public education by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Certain procedures must be followed when registering undocumented immigrant children (and those whose parents are undocumented) in school to avoid violation of their civil rights as outlined in the *Plyler vs. Doe* decision.



☒ Public schools cannot deny admission to a student on the basis of undocumented status.



☒ Public schools cannot require students or parents to disclose their immigration status.



☒ Public schools cannot ask students or parents questions intended to expose their undocumented status.



☒ Public schools cannot require social security numbers from students or parents.



☒ Public schools cannot demand that parents produce driver's licenses or other identification documents for which they may not qualify to have.



☒ Public schools cannot engage in any practices that "chill" or hinder the right of access to school.

All children are required under state laws to attend school until they reach a mandated age.



School personnel have no legal obligation to enforce U.S. immigration laws.



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are to refrain from enforcement actions at certain sensitive locations, which include schools, as detailed in ICE's own policies.



The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act prohibits schools from providing any outside agency (including ICE) with any information from a child's school file that would expose the student's undocumented status.



The only exception is if an agency gets a court order (subpoena) that parents can then challenge.

What schools can do...



Focus on teaching all students.



Pro-actively show parents that their children are welcome.



Ensure teachers and staff are properly trained about protecting the rights of children and on culturally competency.



Communicate with parents in their language.



Share information about resources for students, families and educators (in English and other languages at the school).



Review all of your enrollment and registration documents (including forms, websites, and communications with parents) to be clear that the provision of the child's social security number, birth certificate, etc., is voluntary, and that not providing such information will not bar a child's enrollment.



Adults without social security numbers who are applying for a free lunch and/or breakfast program for a student need only state on the application that they do not have a social security number.



Get more info and resources, including IDRA's School Opening Alert Flier & eBook.
<https://budurl.me/2-IDRAimmiged>



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*achieving equal educational opportunity for every child
through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college*